

# FTC Consumer Alert

Federal Trade Commission ■ Bureau of Consumer Protection ■ Division of Consumer & Business Education

## Diversity Visa Lottery: Read the Rules, Avoid the Rip-Offs

*Prepared in cooperation with the U.S. Department of State.*

### **IMPORTANT NOTICE:**

The State Department has canceled the results of the 2012 Diversity Visa Lottery that were posted at [www.dvlottery.state.gov](http://www.dvlottery.state.gov) in May 2011. A problem with a computer program caused results that were not valid. The results didn't represent a fair, random selection of entrants, which federal law requires.

If you applied to the Diversity Visa Lottery between October 5, 2010 and November 3, 2010, visit [www.dvlottery.state.gov](http://www.dvlottery.state.gov) for more information.

If you or someone you know is trying to get a green card — the right to live in the United States permanently — be aware that unscrupulous businesses and attorneys are looking for that information. They'll claim that, for a fee, they can make it easier to enter the U.S. Department of State's annual Diversity Immigrant Visa (DV) program or increase your chances of being selected. They may use other names for the Diversity Immigrant Visa program, like the DV lottery, the visa lottery, or the green card lottery.

The DV program offers up to 55,000 visas each year for people who want to immigrate to the U.S. Applicants selected in the random drawing are notified by the U.S. State Department, and then are told about the next steps in the process of applying for an immigrant visa. The State Department

doesn't authorize any other organization or private company to notify applicants to the Diversity Visa program about the next steps in the application process for their visas.

You can find instructions on how to prepare and submit entries for the random drawing and the dates of the registration period at [www.dvlottery.state.gov](http://www.dvlottery.state.gov). You must submit your entry to the DV program online at [www.dvlottery.state.gov](http://www.dvlottery.state.gov) during the annual registration period. The State Department doesn't accept paper entries or mail-in requests. You must include all the required biographical information about you, your qualifying spouse, and any children you have who are under 21 years old.

You may submit only one entry during any particular DV registration period. If you submit more than one entry, your entries will be disqualified. Spouses who meet the eligibility requirements may submit separate entries. If only one spouse is selected, the other may apply for a Diversity Visa based on the winning entry of their spouse.

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The DV program has two eligibility requirements:

1. **You must be from an eligible country.** You must have been born in an eligible country, or have parents who were born in eligible countries and who were not residents of your country of birth when you were born. For example, your parents might have lived temporarily in an ineligible country because of their jobs. Each year, the State Department announces the countries whose natives aren't eligible to apply during the registration period.
2. **You must meet an education or training requirement:** a high school education or the successful completion of a 12-year course of elementary and secondary education, or at least two years of work experience within the last five years in an occupation that requires at least two years of training or experience to perform.

## Diversity Visa Scams

According to the Federal Trade Commission, the nation's consumer protection agency, some businesses and attorneys misrepresent their services when it comes to offering to help people trying to enter the Diversity Visa program. They may claim to have:

- an affiliation with the U.S. government
- special expertise or a special entry form that is required for the DV program
- a high success rate for DV entries
- an ability to increase an entrant's chances of being selected, and that
- people from ineligible countries still are "qualified" to enter.

What's more, some businesses and attorneys jeopardize an applicant's opportunity to participate in the lottery by filing several entries. They also may charge substantial fees to complete the application process.

## Protecting Yourself from Fraud

The FTC says knowing how the State Department's Diversity Visa program works is the best way to protect against these scams. For example:

- **There's no charge to enter the DV program.** You can enter on your own at [www.dvlottery.state.gov](http://www.dvlottery.state.gov). You'll need to answer a few questions and provide passport-style digital photographs. Once you've submitted your entry, you'll get an acknowledgment from the State Department, as well as a unique confirmation number.

Hiring a business or an attorney to enter the DV program for you is your decision, but the person you pay must follow the same procedure as you would. Your chance of being selected is the same, whether you submit the entry yourself or you pay someone to do it for you.

- **Submit only one entry.** If you — or someone working on your behalf — submits more than one entry for you, all of your entries will be disqualified. Spouses who are eligible for the DV program can apply separately; the spouse who is not selected can apply for a Diversity Visa based on the selected spouse's entry. That's the only legitimate way to increase your chance of entering the United States through the DV program.
- **Selection of entries is random.** The DV selection process takes place through a computer-generated random drawing. There is no way to increase an applicant's chance of selection.

- **The State Department doesn't notify selected applicants by mail or by email.** Beginning with the DV-2012 program, entrants are responsible for checking the status of their applications through the Entrant Status Check at [www.dvlottery.state.gov](http://www.dvlottery.state.gov).
- **There is no charge to enter the DV program random drawing.** Do not send fees with your application either online or through a wire transfer. If you are selected, you will pay the appropriate visa application and program fees in person at the U.S. embassy or consulate on the day of your visa interview.
- **The only website to use to enter the DV program random drawing is** [www.dvlottery.state.gov](http://www.dvlottery.state.gov). Visa and passport application forms are free online at [www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov). Don't use websites that promise government travel or residency documents online or by mail because applications for U.S., visas, U.S. passports, green cards, and other travel and residency documents are processed in person before an officer of the U.S. government.
- **Keep a close hold on your personal documents.** Unless you have an established relationship with a business, don't mail birth certificates, passports, drivers' licenses, marriage certificates, Social Security cards, or any other documents with your personal identifying information to any person or business that is promising to complete your application for travel or residency documents. These businesses may use your information to commit identity theft.
- **If a website address or domain name doesn't end in .gov, it is not a site of the U.S. government.** Some websites imitate U.S. government sites: some may use domain names that sound like government agencies; others may use emblems (eagles, flags, or other American images like the Statue of Liberty or the U.S. Capitol) that look like they represent U.S. government agencies, or official seals, logos, and links to government sites; and others list a Washington, D.C., mailing addresses. Scam sites may charge for government forms. Don't pay: government forms and instructions for completing them are free from the U.S. government agency that issues them.

## For More Information

For details about the State Department's Diversity Visa program, visit [www.dvlottery.state.gov](http://www.dvlottery.state.gov), or call the State Department's Visa Services' Public Inquiries Branch at **202-663-1225**. This number has recorded information and an option to speak to a visa specialist during business hours. If you are overseas, contact the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate.

The FTC works to prevent fraudulent, deceptive and unfair business practices in the marketplace and to provide information to help consumers spot, stop and avoid them. To file a complaint or get free information on consumer issues, visit [ftc.gov](http://ftc.gov) or call toll-free, **1-877-FTC-HELP** (1-877-382-4357); TTY: 1-866-653-4261. Watch a video, *How to File a Complaint*, at [ftc.gov/video](http://ftc.gov/video) to learn more.

The FTC enters consumer complaints into the Consumer Sentinel Network, a secure online database and investigative tool used by hundreds of civil and criminal law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and abroad.

